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TAGS: [IS KMDR MEDIA REACTION REPORT](#)
SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

Mideast

Key stories in the media:

On Sunday, Yediot led with an "exclusive" filed by its Washington correspondent, Orly Azolai, after a brief conversation she held with President George Bush at the White House Christmas party last Thursday. Azolai quoted Bush as saying he was determined to bring peace between Israel and the Palestinians, but that Syria would have to wait. Azolai was impressed that Bush intends to place his full weight behind the effort to achieve an Israeli-Palestinian peace in the next four years and to take a hands-on approach.

On Sunday, Yediot reported that President Bush told Jewish leaders at a White House Hanukkah reception that he is very worried about the resurgence of anti-Semitism in Europe.

On Monday, all major Hebrew-language media led with calls by Pinchas Wallerstein, the head of the Mateh Binyamin local council in the West Bank and one of the senior members of the Council of Jewish Settlements in the Territories, to engage in nonviolent civil disobedience in an effort to foil the evacuation of settlements in Gaza. Charging that the soon-to-be-established government is "illegitimate," Wallerstein declared that the public should "violate the transfer law and be ready to pay the price of mass imprisonment." Wallerstein himself stated he was prepared to go to jail. Israel Radio cited Acting Justice Minister Tzipi Livni's condemnation of the remarks, and reported that A-G Menachem Mazuz will examine the issue in the next few days. The radio reported that not all members of the Council of Settlements agree with the style of Wallerstein's remarks. Reporting that PM Sharon voiced criticism of Wallerstein's comments, Israel Radio quoted Sharon as saying that the government will do all its power to keep the law.

All media reported that the Likud-Labor agreement reached Saturday night hit a stumbling block Sunday after the chairman of the Knesset's Constitution, Law and Justice Committee, Likud MK Michael Eitan, refuse to rush through legislation to accommodate the deal according to which Labor Party Chairman Shimon Peres is to become the second deputy PM who is authorized to function as acting PM when the PM is away or incapacitated, along with Trade Minister Ehud Olmert, who already holds the title. The Basic Law only provides for one deputy PM. On Sunday, leading media reported that Labor would control five ministries: interior, national infrastructure, construction and housing, tourism, and communications, and would also get three ministers without portfolios.

FM Silvan Shalom was quoted as saying Sunday in an interview with Jerusalem Post that the security fence is not Israel's final border, and that settlers on the "other side" of the barrier should not fear they will necessarily be moved. Shalom was responding to a question about remarks allegedly made by Elliott Abrams, Special Assistant to the President and Senior Director of the National Security Council for Near East and North African Affairs, that eventually all the settlements beyond the fence will be dismantled. Shalom was quoted as saying that the U.S. has never accepted the idea of settlements in the territories,

and that the settlers went to live in those areas "knowing that the Israeli government took the decision to settle them there, not because the Americans gave any approval." Shalom did not rule out the possibility that settlers in places such as Beit El could be moved "in 40 or 50 years."

Over the weekend, leading media reported that 11 Palestinians were killed during the raid in Khan Yunis. All media reported that three Qassam rockets were fired at Sderot Sunday, lightly injuring three people. Eleven rocket attacks took place against the city and its surroundings over the weekend. Leading media quoted Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz and IDF sources as saying that if the firing continues, Israel will resume its offensive in the northern Gaza Strip. Hatzofoe quoted a senior Israeli military source as saying that the IDF is unable carry out a military operation like the 2002 Operation Defensive Shield, because of lack of funds.

Ha'aretz reported that Egypt's intelligence chief Omar Suleiman is scheduled to come to Israel on Tuesday to finalize discussions regarding the deployment of Egyptian troops along the Philadelphi Route. Leading media reported that Sunday a special ministerial committee approved the release of 170 Palestinian prisoners in what PM Sharon described as a "good will gesture" to Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak following the freeing of Azzam Azzam two weeks ago.

Israel Radio reported on a new Israel-PA meeting to coordinate positions ahead of the January elections: Sharon advisers Dov Weisglass and Shalom Turjeman met last night with senior PA officials Saeb Erekat and Hassan Abu Libdeh. The sides agreed that there will be a new meeting this week to recap Israel's assistance in the Palestinian elections, and that voting in East Jerusalem will take place in the same way as in 1996: polling booths will be set up in five post offices.

On Sunday, Jerusalem Post quoted PLO Chairman Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen) as saying Saturday in Oman that the Palestinians would make no concessions on the right of return.

On Sunday, Ha'aretz and Jerusalem Post quoted deputy A-G for international law Shavit Matias as saying Saturday that the Justice Ministry believes that if Israel withdraws from the Philadelphi Route, an international legal consensus will be established, according to which the Israeli occupation of the Gaza Strip would have ended and Israel would no longer be responsible, as an occupying power, for events in the Strip. Jerusalem Post quoted a "senior international source" as saying Sunday that the PA would like Israel to tear down all houses in the settlements of Gush Katif in the Gaza Strip before the area is handed over to the Palestinians. The newspaper reported that a PA minister immediately confirmed this.

On Sunday, Jerusalem Post reported that four House Democrats -- Robert Wexler (FL), Robert Menendez (NJ), and Eliot Engel and Gary Ackerman of New York -- sent a letter to President Bush on Thursday urging him to provide them "with information that will clarify the circumstances" surrounding the FBI's investigation into AIPAC.

Leading media reported that the Iranian intelligence services issued a vague statement Sunday indicated that they have uncovered a spy ring of eight people suspected of collecting intelligence information for Israel. Jerusalem Post cited the Prime Minister's Office's response that Iran's claim is "ridiculous."

On Sunday, Jerusalem Post quoted a senior USG official as saying: "It is clear we are heading into some kind of confrontation with Syria unless the Syrians reverse their position." The newspaper reported that the U.S., which is angry at Damascus for sheltering members of active opponents to the Iraqi regime, is contemplating a range of punitive measures to use against Syria.

On Sunday, leading media reported that Ukrainian presidential contender Viktor Yushchenko, who was poisoned with dioxin, is considering getting medical treatment in Israel.

On Sunday, leading media reported that a document filed Friday by the Justice Department and the Department of Homeland Security seeks John Demjanjuk's deportation for his participation in Nazi-sponsored persecution while serving as an armed SS guard and because he lied about his wartime job and residences when he applied for an immigration visa in 1952.

Jerusalem Post quoted PA officials as saying on Sunday that Israel is allowing candidates in the elections to travel freely in the territories. Ha'aretz quoted a senior Hamas leader in the West Bank city of Dahariyeh as saying that the arrest by the Shin Bet of four Hamas candidates in the upcoming municipal elections in his town is a "political targeted killing."

On Sunday, Yediot quoted Peres as saying in an interview with the French daily Le Figaro that the seaport and airport of Gaza should be reopened.

Ha'aretz reported that terrorist attacks and pressure by the government of Thailand has led to an exodus of Thai workers from Gush Katif in the Gaza Strip, and that farmers there are said to fear a collapse of their farmers. Thailand's Labor Minister Uraiwan Thienthong and the Thai Ambassador to Israel met on Saturday with around 150 Thai workers in Gush Katif and asked them to leave the area as soon as possible.

Yediot cited Interior Ministry data according to which local councils in the territories received in 2003 four times the amount of government allocations granted to local councils in poor "development towns."

Yediot reported that Deputy Speaker of the Knesset Likud MK Moshe Kahlon met Sunday in Rome with a senior Libyan official.

Ha'aretz and Jerusalem Post reported that during a visit to Israel Sunday, 1976 Nobel Peace Prize laureate Mairead Corrigan Maguire compared Israel's reported nuclear arsenal to Hitler's gas chambers, while calling for travel restriction to be lifted on nuclear whistleblower Mordecai Vanunu.

Maariv cited an internal Immigrant Absorption Ministry report whose data cover the years 1989-2003, which says that 22.9 percent of immigrants from the U.S. left Israel during that period. During that period, 8.8 percent of all immigrants dropped out. Only 7.6 percent of immigrants from the CIS left Israel.

On Sunday, Maariv cited a survey conducted among Israeli youth aged 15-18 and 21-24:
-51 percent said Israeli Arabs should be prevented from being elected in the Knesset.
-67 percent stated: "The Arabs would have annihilated Israel if they only could."
-33 percent believe that democracy should be significantly restricted, in case of even a minor threat to the state's security.

Mideast:

Summary:

Washington correspondent Orly Azolai wrote in mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: "Bush is serious. This time he isn't merely talking; he really intends to produce an agreement that will have his name on it."

Independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized: "Israel, which wanted a different Palestinian leadership ... now finds itself in a dilemma.... The government and the IDF must act within these new constraints."

Senior Middle East affairs analyst Zvi Bar'el wrote in Ha'aretz: "[A possible trend of 'self-normalization'] is good news for Israel, provided it doesn't make everyone angry by trying to play the patron again."

Diplomatic correspondent Aluf Benn wrote in Ha'aretz: "Let us not forget the contemptible statement about 'the way in which the right of return could be realized,' which the European Union published in response to U.S. President George W. Bush's letter to Ariel Sharon."

Publicist Benny Cohen wrote in popular, pluralist Maariv: "One shouldn't ignore the fact that Arab televisions are allowing themselves to broadcast 'propaganda' for peace with Israel."

Block Quotes:

I. "The President Is Determined"

Washington correspondent Orly Azolai wrote in mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (December 19): "Bush is serious. This time he isn't merely talking; he really intends to produce an agreement that will have his name on it.... Bush's body language in the conversation I had with him at the traditional Christmas party indicated that this time he means to remove the obstacles with his own two hands. He is truly confident that now that Arafat has been removed peace is within reach.... The President has not yet decided on a timetable, but the general direction of things is clear: first Israel and the Palestinians, while Syria will be dealt with only at a later stage.... Bush will be sworn in for his second term in office on January 20. Shortly thereafter both Sharon and Abu Mazen will hear from him. The President, who described himself as a wartime president in his first term in office, wants his second term to go down as one in which peace was achieved. The fact that the war in Iraq has become bogged down and exacts more and more American casualties with every passing day has only intensified his determination to achieve peace in the Middle East. That is why he is going to let Sharon begin to implement the disengagement plan, will let the Palestinians elect their new leadership, and then he is going to take the reins into his own hands and will try to show the world what the lord of the manor is capable of doing when he so desires."

II. "Acting Within New Constraints"

Independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized (December 20): "Israel, which wanted a different Palestinian leadership -- something that, according to Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, is likely to turn 2005 into a year of great opportunity -- now finds itself in a dilemma. On one hand, no government can sit on its hands when its towns are attacked by rockets; Israel cannot abandon the towns of the western Negev to their fate. Yet on the other hand, a massive operation against the Palestinians is liable to dissipate the atmosphere of good will that has begun to develop and is necessary to ensure that the historic opportunity comes to pass. Therefore, the government and the IDF must act within these new constraints.... Right now, while Palestinian leaders are trying to convince their public to stop the armed Intifada, Israel must be careful not to play into the hands of opponents of this policy. Instead, it must help the PA to draw a line between adherents of the diplomatic process and those who want to continue fueling the flames. Without this crucial distinction, Israel will not be able to reach the desired goal: for the disengagement plan to cease to be a unilateral Israeli measure and for it to bring additional agreements in its wake."

III. "Don't Play the Patron"

Senior Middle East affairs analyst Zvi Bar'el wrote in Ha'aretz (December 19): "The official assessment [in Egypt] is that the trade agreement, once it reaches maturity in three or four years -- that is, after the establishment of the factories and the creation of the marketing network in the United States -- will create 'only' 100,000 new jobs a year. That, too, is a tremendous gain in a country that 'creates' tens of thousands of fictitious jobs every year in the governmental system and is not succeeding in implementing its privatization plan. Egypt is not the only [Middle Eastern] country that is in need of a mass production of jobs.... Economic needs in the region, which will become increasingly more acute, may impose the creation of an atmosphere that promotes trade.... It is possible that the trade agreement with Egypt is the first signal of this new trend, in which economic interests overcome sentimentalism and the settling of accounts with the past. The trend of 'self-normalization,' even if under constraint, is beginning to do a calculation of real profit and loss instead of examining the prestige index. If this is, indeed, the trend, it is good news for Israel, provided it doesn't make everyone angry by trying to play the patron again."

IV. "Enlightened But Exasperating Europe"

Diplomatic correspondent Aluf Benn wrote in Ha'aretz (December 20): "Fortunately, since [the Yom Kippur War] Israel has not been dependent on European generosity. And the crude self-interest of 1973 has been replaced by a policy of preaching morality.... It is exasperating to hear European foreign ministers talking about 'Israel's right to exist' as if it were being put to the test. Who's asking them? Will an Israeli foreign minister ever talk about France or Germany's

'right to exist'? Are the Europeans talking like this in Damascus and in Cairo as well? The Europeans' votes in the United Nations are masterpieces of diplomatic cowardice, as is the European support for self-defense against terror while condemning the means Israel has used against it. And let us not forget the contemptible statement about 'the way in which the right of return could be realized,' which the European Union published in response to U.S. President George W. Bush's letter to Ariel Sharon, which recognized the Jewish settlement blocs in the territories.... The European dislike of the use of force is not a sanctified value. Inherent in it is the danger of resignation to a determined aggressor like the leadership of Iran. There must be no hasty bombardment of the Iranian installations, but giving up the military stick a priori weakens Fischer's diplomacy, and ultimately it will leave Israel alone facing the Iranian warheads. The main thing is that it will be in accordance with international law and UN resolutions."

IV. "A Peace Promo in Arabic"

Publicist Benny Cohen wrote in popular, pluralist Maariv (December 19): "The 'Geneva Initiative' is currently screening a television campaign that includes promos on which 'partners' for peace are being presented. Palestinian figures address the Israeli public, who declare that 'there is a partner' for peace. The ads aimed at the Palestinian public convey a similar message.... The campaign's key importance lies in its very appearance on the screens of all Arab TV networks. This is a significant novelty to which attention must be given. The campaign producers must emphasize it.... In addition to the Palestinian TV channels, the campaign will also be broadcasted on the Arab TV station Al-Arabiya. One shouldn't ignore the fact that Arab televisions are allowing themselves to broadcast 'propaganda' for peace with Israel -- even if those are paid ads. The very fact that those TVs literally put themselves at risk by broadcasting this message, shows that there is change. Until recently it had been obvious to Israel and to those broadcasters that it was dangerous to get near 'propaganda' that was considered pro-Zionist."

KURTZER